

The information below applies to licensed child care centers, not participating in ExceleRate Illinois above the Licensed Circle of Quality. Please review the important details below if your center plans on applying for a Bronze, Silver or Gold Circle of Quality through the Licensed Child Care Center Assessment Path.

ExceleRate Illinois Quality Recognition and Improvement System (QRIS) emphasizes continuous quality improvement for early learning and development programs. It helps programs keep their focus on the top priority- quality services for children and families- by offering resources, tools, supports and guidance to make quality improvements that you can identify.

The Environment Rating Scales (ERS) are used as one of the measures of quality within ExceleRate Illinois in the Assessment Path. The ERS are designed to assess classroom quality within early childhood programs. In Illinois, ERS are used for classroom self-assessment and on-site verification by an independent assessor to look at various classroom aspects such as space & furnishings, activities, interactions, etc.

The 3 ERS tools recognized in ExceleRate Illinois for centers are:

- Infant Toddler Environment Rating Scale-Revised (ITERS-R)
- Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale-3rd Edition (ECERS-3)
- School-Age Care Environment Rating Scale- Updated (SACERS-U)

In December 2024, it was announced that Illinois will be transitioning to using a new tool in ExceleRate Illinois. **ITERS-3** will replace ITERS-R to assess classrooms where most children are birth to 36 months old. ITERS-3 is like the other ERS tools in format and method of scoring; however, the Scale authors have made some important enhancements, including:

- Greater focus on intentional teaching and interactions with children as they use materials.
- Based entirely on the 3-hour observation; no longer includes a teacher interview.
- Accessibility looks at access to materials based on the abilities of young infants, older non-mobile infants, and mobile children; no longer includes “Much of the Day”.
- Provisions for relaxation and comfort included in Space and furnishings subscale.
- Interaction and Language and Books subscales expanded to include 6 items.
- Provisions for children with disabilities incorporated into other items.

To learn more about ITERS-3, please visit

Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale®, Third Edition (ITERS-3™) | Environment Rating Scales®

1. How is ITERS-3 being incorporated into ExceleRate Illinois?

Assessment in classrooms with children birth to 36 months scheduled for January 1, 2026 and beyond will include ITERS-3 assessment. Application requirements will include ExceleRate approved ERS training (for the on-site administrator and 50% of teaching staff) and ITERS-3 self-assessment. The administrator and teaching staff (in classroom serving children birth to 36 months) should complete ExceleRate-approved ITERS-3 training. ECERS-3 and SACERS-U will continue to be used for other age groups within centers. Please take note of the timeframes included in the following questions.

2. My center does not currently have a Bronze, Silver or Gold Circle of Quality, but we are preparing to apply through the licensed child care center assessment path soon. Will our center be assessed using ITERS-R or ITERS-3?

Licensed child care centers who don't currently hold an ExceleRate Bronze, Silver or Gold Circle of Quality are welcome to apply at any time once meeting initial eligibility requirements.

ExceleRate Bronze, Silver and Gold licensed child care center (assessment path) applications postmarked/email date stamped **October 1, 2025 (or after)** will include:

- The on-site program administrator and 50% of teaching staff must have completed ExceleRate approved ERS training (**How ERS Works** available in August/September 2025 or **Introduction to ERS** 2007-June 2025)
<https://www.exceleRateillinois.com/licensed-child-care-centers/resources/training>
- The on-site program administrator and teaching staff in classrooms where most of the children are birth to 36 months old should complete ITERS-3 training to prepare for on-site assessment.
- At Silver and Gold, **ITERS-3** self-assessment and **ITERS-3** on-site assessment will occur.

3. Why is Illinois setting the October 1, 2025 ExceleRate application timeframe?

Illinois will begin conducting ITERS-3 assessments in classrooms where most of children are birth to 36 months old starting **January 1, 2026**. Due to the significant financial investment in Illinois to maintain the high reliability of assessors on all of the assessment Scales used in ExceleRate Illinois, one ERS specific to infant and toddler classrooms will be our focus.

The McCormick Institute for Early Childhood, Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National Louis University (Illinois' assessment entity) schedules on-site assessments for Silver and Gold applicants (including licensed child care centers, licensed family child care, and Head Start programs) after each application is processed and information is provided by INCCRRA. The October 1, 2025 date is established in order for Illinois to meet the January 1, 2026 deadline of only using ITERS-3.

When a center submits an ExceleRate application, there is potential for the application to be incomplete. To allow the center time to complete requirements, ExceleRate policy and procedures allow for a pending timeframe. It is likely that an application received on or after October 1, 2025 would have their assessment window set to occur after January 1, 2026.

4. What is the wait time from when I apply to when on-site assessment may occur?

It is important for each center to understand the application requirements and submit all documentation with the application in a timely manner, including getting Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (IDCFS) licensing violations cleared with IDCFS (*see question #5*). INCCRRA cannot fully process the application until all required documentation is received and reviewed. Once your application has been determined complete by INCCRRA, your program information can be distributed to National Louis University (NLU) for Silver or Gold assessment to be scheduled.

As the application process is ongoing, there is no definite timeframe that can be provided for how many weeks out the assessment window will be. Generally, once INCCRRA has determined that a program is ready for on-site assessment, the program should anticipate that the assessment window will be scheduled to occur approximately 6-8 weeks from that point (sometimes less, sometimes more). This depends on several factors, including number of programs already in the queue for assessment, the number of classrooms within each program, etc.

5. What happens if my center has IDCFS licensing violations that aren't resolved by October 1, 2025?

A center must be licensed for at least one year before applying for an ExceleRate Bronze, Silver or Gold Circle of Quality. An IDCFS license in good standing is the basis for the Licensed Child Care Center path of ExceleRate Illinois. Good standing, for ExceleRate Illinois purposes, means that the licensee has no IDCFS substantiated or pending violations from the previous 12 months of ExceleRate application date. Programs can check their IDCFS status by calling **1-877-746-0829** or visiting <https://sunshine.dcf.illinois.gov/Content/Licensing/Daycare/MonitoringReports.aspx>.

While ExceleRate policy allows a pending application timeframe for programs to work with IDCFS to clear any pending or substantiated violations, the pending period would likely extend the ExceleRate application to a point where assessment would occur after January 1, 2026 (which will include ITERS-3 requirements as described in previous questions).

If a center's pending application timeframe will extend into October 2025, the program's ExceleRate application may still be processed, but the program will have additional criteria to meet including ITERS-3 self-assessment in classrooms with children birth to 36 months and ITERS-3 training to prepare for on-site ITERS-3 assessment. Ultimately, the pending and/or substantiated IDCFS violations must be corrected/unfounded/unsubstantiated for the ExceleRate application to be processed.

6. Is INCCRRA stopping the application intake process for ExceleRate?

No, INCCRRA is not stopping intake of ExceleRate applications. Applications for Bronze, Silver or Gold can be submitted at any time. (*See previous questions for timeframes to be aware of*).

7. When will ITERS-3 training, and technical assistance be available?

We anticipate ITERS-3 training and technical assistance availability in Summer 2025.

8. Who should I contact if I still have questions?

If you have questions related to ExceleRate, you can contact INCCRRA at 866-697-8278 to speak with an ExceleRate counsellor or submit your question to info@excelerateillinois.com.

Your local CCR&R Quality Specialist (QS) or Infant Toddler Child Care Specialist (ITCCS) is also available to assist if your center is ready to work towards application to ExceleRate.

To see how the QS or ITCCS can assist and for contact information, please visit [Child Care Resource & Referral \(CCR&R\) Agencies - ExceleRate Illinois](#).



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ExceleRate® Illinois is administered through INCCRRA under the joint direction of the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois State Board of Education.